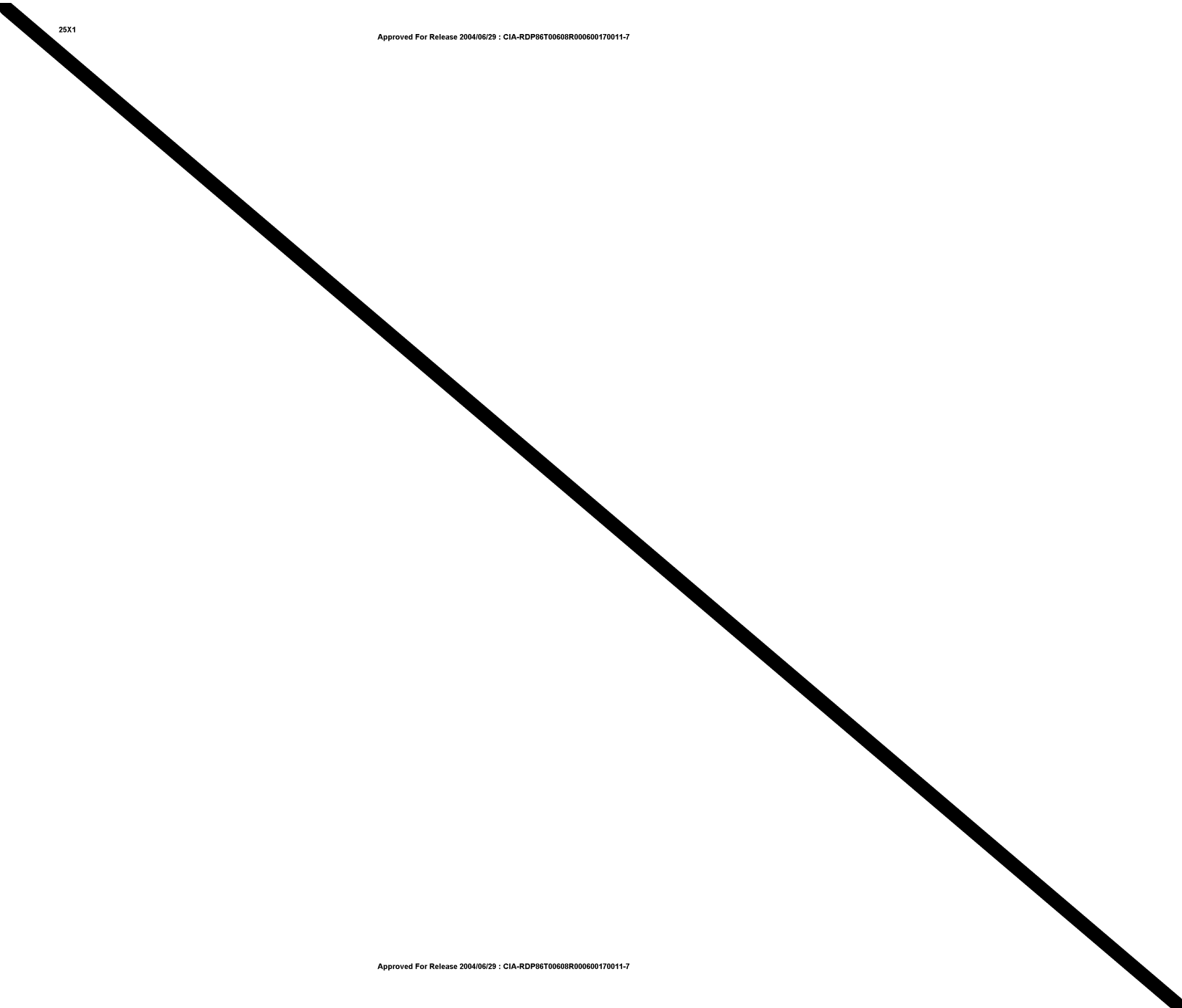

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Research Study

The Chinese Assessment of the Soviet Military Threat

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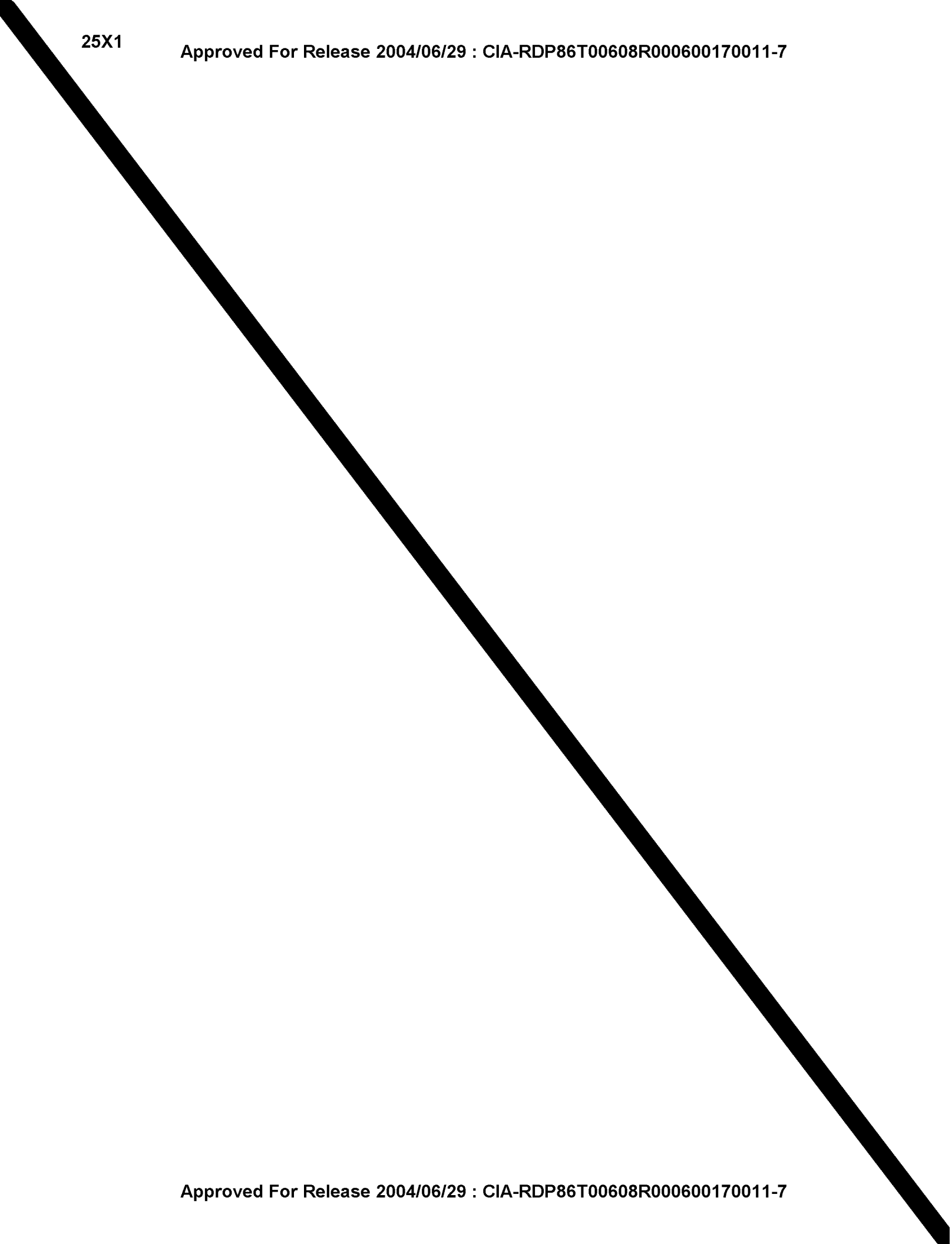

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

OFFICE OF POLITICAL RESEARCH

April 1975

THE CHINESE ASSESSMENT OF THE SOVIET MILITARY THREAT

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This study is of the Soviet military threat to China as the Chinese see it—in terms of both Soviet capabilities and Soviet intentions. The study is concerned with the Chinese view of:

— the possibility of an escalation of the Sino-Soviet border conflict, a conflict provoked originally by the Chinese themselves; and

— the possibility of a Soviet decision to launch a massive conventional attack or a disarming nuclear strike for larger strategic reasons, i.e., to dispose of an intransigently hostile potential superpower.

Western observers—inside and outside the intelligence community—have reached very different conclusions about the chances of a Soviet military attack on China, whether growing out of the border conflict or deriving from Soviet assessments of the overall strategic situation. We have thought that the statements and actions of the Chinese themselves, as the most interested parties, might be illuminating.

The Chinese have given to various audiences at various times very different assessments of the prospects of Soviet attack—in a range from alarmist to complacent—so that it has been necessary to evaluate these statements in the context of Chinese actions of the time. We have reviewed all available Chinese statements on this matter, and we have tried to distinguish between statements that seemed to represent genuine assessments—i.e., were consonant with Chinese actions—and those that seemed to be made for a variety of political purposes.

Our analysis centers on the former: the Chinese assessment of the degree of danger of a Soviet attack at well-marked points in the evolution of the Sino-Soviet relationship. We attempt to reach sharper conclusions than the well-known and generally-accepted one that the Chinese for the past decade have felt threatened by the Soviet Union.

The effort here is to track the genuine Chinese assessment as it has changed at different times to determine:

— whether the Chinese have ever truly feared that a Soviet attack, however originating, might be imminent;

— if so, what political and military measures they took at that time to reduce the prospect of an attack;

— whether their assessments of the prospect of attack, however originating, have shown a long-term pattern of change, a consistently rising or declining curve;

— and what their view of the Soviet military threat is today, and what they are doing about it.

The Chinese view of the threat from the border dispute—which is just one part of a Sino-Soviet conflict across the board—depends upon Peking's assessment as to whether it can keep alive Mao Tse-tung's claims to Soviet border areas which have never been under Chinese Communist jurisdiction, and to establish Chinese presence in these areas, without seriously risking a large-scale Soviet military attack. The central questions in the Chinese assessment of the prospect of a Soviet strategic attack on China as a whole are whether the Chinese feel that the Russians are seriously tempted to make such an attack, and, if so, whether the Chinese calculate that they can persuade Moscow that this could not be done at acceptable political and military cost.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In their patrolling of the Sino-Soviet border during the early and mid-1960s, Chinese leaders were not frightened by Soviet threats. It was not until 1969, following the Chinese ambush of Soviet border guards, that the Chinese came to believe that a major Soviet attack on China might be imminent.

The one Chinese fright—in August and September 1969—derived partly from localized Soviet military action but mainly from Soviet threats of larger actions which were credible to the Chinese, causing them to conclude that their policy of the time—of asserting territorial claims by aggressive forward patrolling on the border—was more dangerous than they had estimated. Mao backed off from a confrontation; he decided to avoid additional provocation by halting the patrols, and he agreed to resume negotiations with the Soviets.

The hard line taken by the Chinese in the negotiations, however—refusing to make any concessions and insisting on a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Chinese-claimed areas before substantive discussions could begin—showed that fear that a Soviet attack might be imminent dropped off sharply once the talks had begun.

Because the Chinese since 1969 have avoided provoking the Soviets at the border, they have not needed to fear an escalation as much. The pattern seems to show a steadily declining curve.

Nevertheless, beyond the question of border provocations, the Chinese have remained concerned about the continuing strategic military threat. Here too the pattern has been one of declining concern, but in the nature of the case the concern cannot be eliminated.

The Chinese have taken various measures, military and political, to reduce the danger of a possible Soviet attack. They have continued to improve their defenses against ground attack, and to develop their own nuclear forces as a sobering if modest deterrent. Also to serve the interest of deterrence, they have at times magnified and at times downplayed Soviet military capabilities and intentions. This has put the Chinese in the somewhat absurd position of arguing, in one period, that China was greatly threatened (requiring Western pressure on Moscow to desist), and, more lately, that China is not so threatened

but that the *West* is (so that NATO forces should not be reduced). While the arguments adduced for a tough Western military posture toward the USSR have changed, the results desired have not.

The Chinese view today is short of fear, but also short of complacence. They are therefore continuing to develop their military strength and to encourage a strong Western strategic disposition against the Soviets—a NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation—which will reduce both the short-term and the long-term threat to China.

After Mao's death, some Chinese leaders will probably actively argue that Peking should seek a border settlement on reasonable terms (which the Chinese have not done to date), again seeking to reduce both the short-term and the long-term threat. In the meantime, even the Mao-dominated leadership will probably avoid direct physical provocation on the border.

Peking can be expected to maintain that China will retaliate if attacked, while emphasizing that China's military posture is defensive (as it is). At the same time, the Chinese will probably try to sustain and strengthen the Sino-American rapprochement as a stronger long-term deterrent to Soviet attack than China itself can provide. But because the Chinese intend to win Taiwan, they will seek to persuade the US that China does not need such rapprochement at the cost of a halt in US disengagement from Taipei. Should it come to a choice, the value to Peking of rapprochement, against the Soviet threat, would probably prove greater than that of early annexation of Taiwan.

In sum, the Chinese probably conclude that:

(1) They can avoid an escalation of the border conflict simply by avoiding provocation;

(2) In the immediate post-Mao situation, the Soviets, rather than intervening militarily in China, are likely to wait for the post-Mao leadership to make or respond to initiatives for an improvement in relations; and

(3) Even failing an early improvement, the Soviets would be unlikely to choose to accept the political and military costs of a strategic attack on China, but would probably continue to wait (as they could well afford to wait), hoping for better from some successor Chinese leadership.

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THE DISCUSSION

I. THE SOVIET ALLY BECOMES A MILITARY OPPONENT: 1960-1969

Chinese perception of the Soviets as an enemy was an incremental, not a sudden development. After the outbreak of the Sino-Soviet dispute into public polemics in 1960, it was three years before the Chinese leaders came to view the Russians seriously as a potential military adversary. Chinese strategic thinking in the early 1960s had envisaged possible attacks from US-supported Nationalist forces in the east (across the Taiwan Strait) and Indian forces in the southwest, but had given little attention to the possibility of Soviet initiated hostilities on the northern and western borders until mid-1963. [redacted] when the Chinese began to build a string of border defense stations in the northeast [redacted] it was primarily for the purpose of preventing refugees from crossing into Soviet territory and secondarily for the purpose of keeping Soviet agents out. Even when, in the spring of 1963, the main mission of these troops became that of disputing Soviet-controlled territory (primarily islands in the two border rivers, the Amur and the Ussuri), no shooting occurred and the Chinese seemed to feel that the only military confrontation they had to worry about was pushing-and-shoving engagements at the border between border guard patrols. However, by the summer of 1963, both sides increased the number of troops near the border.

A. First Chinese Perception of a Soviet Military Threat: 1963

Khrushchev, annoyed by Mao's new policy of trying to dispute Soviet-held border territory, issued at first oblique and then direct warnings that asserting claims by aggressive patrolling might trigger a major Soviet military response. [redacted]

[redacted]

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On 2 August, the Peking *People's Daily* reflected the Chinese assessment that a serious threat existed; for the first time the Party paper complained of a "US-Soviet alliance against China." [redacted]

[redacted] However, it is unlikely that the Chinese had suddenly come to fear that a major Soviet attack, conventional or nuclear, was a *near-term* possibility. The Sino-Soviet agreement to start border talks in February 1964 did not result from Soviet pressures; it was a development which the Chinese had set in motion in 1963 *before* the Soviets had made their threatening statements.

Khrushchev's position during the negotiations was to refuse to withdraw Soviet forces from areas held by the Soviets well before Mao's regime had been established in 1949, but to make an exception of certain small islands in the border rivers. Mao wanted, by contrast, a Soviet political capitulation: a declaration that the treaties between the tsars and Imperial China had been "unequal." He also wanted the big river island opposite Khabarovsk. Mao could not be mollified; he broke the secrecy of the talks by making a public statement on 10 July 1964, and he taunted Khrushchev by declaring that he would continue the Sino-Soviet dispute with impunity—free from the danger of Soviet attack.

> Regarding war on paper, there are no dead in such a war. We have been waging such a war for several years already, and not a single person has died. We are prepared to wage this war another 25 years. (Mao statement of 10 July, printed in Tokyo *Shekai Shuho* on 11 August 1964.)

Khrushchev was convinced by this Chinese resort to public maneuver and by the course of the secret talks that it was useless to continue to negotiate with Mao. He withdrew the Soviet delegation on 15 August. In the strongest public threat to use nuclear weapons against China ever made by

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Khrushchev, he warned that it would be "dangerous" to encroach on Soviet borders "given up-to-date weapons of annihilation" in the Soviet arsenal (speech of 15 September 1964). His policy was thus now to "rattle" nuclear weapons toward China, as he had done in the past to many other countries.

However, Mao and his lieutenants were able, given this clearly marked pattern of Khrushchev's behavior, to distinguish a bluff from a real threat of imminent attack. Chinese perception of the credibility of a Soviet threat was highly context-dependent, keyed to the positioning of Soviet forces. Khrushchev had failed to frighten the Chinese into ceasing their border probes because he had not made his threats sufficiently credible, either by deploying tactical nuclear weapons or by a big conventional buildup of regular forces on the frontier.

By contrast, the post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership avoided threatening China with a nuclear strike (until 1969). The Soviet leaders were willing, however, to make moves which were more costly in terms of committing military manpower and resources to the border area.

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The Chinese were aware of the Soviet buildup, and they seem to have had an increased sense that a war with the USSR, including the engagement of major ground forces, was a real possibility. This view was privately expressed by Chou En-lai in early 1966 and by Teng Hsiao-ping (among others) in mid-March. However, they still apparently did not perceive the threat of a major war as *imminent*: they spoke only of an "eventual" or an "inevitable" war with the USSR. Nevertheless, the USSR in fact had become the PRC's principal enemy, although not yet in official statements and documents.

B. First Serious Consideration of Being a Possible Nuclear Target: 1966

Chou and Teng in early 1966 had been speaking about Soviet conventional forces, but shortly thereafter, the Chinese for the first time seemed to *take seriously* the possibility that the Soviets would use nuclear weapons against them, whether in escalation of the border conflict or in a massive disarming strike. This new assessment was reflected in a public interview given by former Foreign Minister Chen Yi, who declared that:

> Soviet missiles may one day fly from Moscow to Peking. Peking is already an atomic target. (Quoted by a Uruguayan newsman in *Marcha*, 1 May 1966.)

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The Soviets showed concern—as they had in the summer of 1964—about Vladivostok as the city most vulnerable to Chinese ground attack. It was in Vladivostok that Brezhnev made the remark that the Soviet Far East is a land "whose every foot" glorifies the courage of Russian man (speech of 19 May 1966). Podgorny in Khabarovsk spoke on 1 June of the need to "guard" and "if necessary, defend" the USSR's Far East borders. The Soviets continued to build up their regular army units along the frontier.

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C. Chinese Continue to Believe a Soviet Attack Not Imminent: 1967-1969

Chinese actions in this period reflected an apparent belief that any Soviet attack in the near future would be conventional in nature, if it came at all, and planning continued to be for the *distant* future. Although construction was begun on some new airfields, and several early-warning radar sites were established near the border, the Chinese did not substantially increase their forces in 1966. Moreover, military contact with Soviet troops was limited to border patrol encounters, and both sides adhered to no-shooting policies. [redacted]

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Pushing-and-shoving encounters on the Amur and Ussuri river islands, incited by Red Guards and Chinese border patrols rejecting Soviet border guard demands to cease patrolling and return to the Chinese bank, reportedly were widespread in the winter of 1967 during Mao's Cultural Revolution. (The 1969 fighting was at points which had been tense for at least two years.) [redacted]

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It is necessary to reiterate that, despite this post-Czechoslovakia assessment, the Chinese did not seem to feel that the danger of a major Soviet attack was *imminent*. Thus, they sustained their forward patrolling along the border, disputing Soviet control of certain border areas, mainly the islands in the Amur and Ussuri rivers, and calculating that the Soviets would not be provoked into striking back with a major attack. When Chou En-lai in a speech on 29 September complained about overflights and "massive troop concentrations" on the border, he went on to say that Moscow's "military threats and war blackmail" would have "no effect whatsoever."

II. IMMINENT POSSIBILITY OF A MAJOR SOVIET ATTACK: 1969

Mao and his aides clearly believed themselves to be expert in assessing the degree of tolerance in the policy of a military superpower confronting China. They had been engaged in one war (Korea) in which they risked the US use of nuclear weapons and had gone to the brink of war twice (the two Taiwan Strait crises in 1954 and 1958)—and had emerged from each confrontation with a conviction that they had had some leeway for probing to gauge US determination to defend friendly countries. They seem to have transferred their conviction—that they were expert in assessing a superior adversary's tolerance of probing—to their confrontation with the Soviets.

A. Chinese Provocations: March-August 1969

The Chinese leaders in 1969 tested the degree of Soviet tolerance of provocation as they carried out a policy of forward patrolling to contest Chinese-defined "disputed" areas, keeping the probes down to small-scale encounters. Mao and his aides undoubtedly calculated that they had leeway to engage in such encounters with conventional weapons without provoking a major Soviet attack against China. They seem to have anticipated retaliation by small Soviet conventional-force units only. They guessed right about the *level* of Soviet retaliation. Between 2 March and mid-August, every Soviet riposte to Chinese patrol probes was carried out with such conventional ground weapons as artillery, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and automatic rifles. No aircraft were used, nor did the Soviets expand the conflict from the immediate areas of the skirmishes. Soviet conventional weapons, and the mobility supplied by their armored personnel carriers, were sufficient to defeat each of the Chinese border units they were used against. However, the Chinese policy remained within the confines of rational calculation, and despite Soviet charges of Chinese "madness," there was method in it. The level of Chinese provocation was also kept down by spreading the attacks out in time, by the use of small units, and by Chinese probing at a variety of points.

The Chinese ambush of a Soviet border guard unit on Chen Pao Island on 2 March was a definite escalation. Mao and his aides appear to have chosen that particular Ussuri River island which provided them with the strongest case of Chinese ownership: Chen Pao was not only on the Chinese side of the main navigational channel in the Ussuri, but also was virtually a part of the Chinese bank. The opposing Soviet border guard unit at least twice previously (in late January and early February; in the latter instance, riflebutts were used by both sides in a fight) had come out across the river ice to the Chinese side onto Chen Pao to order Chinese forces to withdraw. Mao undoubtedly had been angered by this bullying, and apparently was determined to demonstrate to the Soviet leaders that their nuclear capability against China would not impose passivity on Chinese forces, border units included. The ambush of Soviet forces at Chen Pao escalated the dispute to a major shooting incident. In subsequent engagements at Chen Pao and other points along the border, the Soviets used their superior firepower to effectively defeat Chinese units entering Soviet-controlled territory.

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fight. A new firefight did occur on 15 March and, despite a Chinese defeat by Soviet troops using armored personnel carriers, tanks, and artillery, Mao continued to contest the island and other territory along the border.

there was some evidence of tanks and artillery being dispersed and revetted against a possible air attack, Mao's actions on the border made it clear that he was not intimidated.*

As they carried out their forward patrolling onto disputed territory, and as their border guard units were defeated in almost every small-scale firefight, the Chinese kept alert for signs that the Soviets might be considering a nuclear strike against Chinese targets. What they seem to have perceived were Soviet political signals intended to frighten them into desisting on the border.

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Soviet envoys abroad informed governments (among others) privately that Moscow would take any steps necessary to force the Chinese to stop border probing. These vague warnings conveyed in mid-March were not as explicit as the threat to use nuclear weapons if necessary, which was made by the less official Soviet instrument, Moscow's Radio Peace and Progress:

> . . . are we afraid of Mao Tse-tung and his pawns, who are making a display of might on our border? . . . The whole world knows that the main striking force of the Soviet armed forces is its rocket units. (Broadcast of 15 March 1969.)

Peking later (on 2 June) complained about this threatening language and showed some concern, but the Chinese calculated correctly that the Soviet leaders would continue to avoid striking back with a major attack.

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*Despite their defeat in March, the Chinese subsequently returned to Chen Pao, dug in their forces, and remain entrenched to this day. The Soviets apparently had a similar view of Chinese rights to this particular island and did not continue to contest it.

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B. Chinese Alarm and Retreat: August-September 1969

The Soviets were confronted with the task of convincing the Chinese that the alternative to negotiations was a major attack on China, conventional or nuclear, and that Moscow would not permit the Chinese to bleed the Russians endlessly in a series of small-scale skirmishes. The Soviets set about raising Chinese concern to a level of anxiety sufficient to impel Mao and his aides finally to desist and agree to negotiations.

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*Between August and October, Chinese provincial broadcasts for the first time referred to the USSR as China's "principal enemy," officially displacing the US in that role.

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If anything further was needed to persuade the Chinese to desist, it was probably supplied by information that Western intelligence services, particularly the American intelligence community, had become alarmed about the possibility of a Soviet strike. The Chinese undoubtedly were aware [redacted] 25X1 25X1 of a 28 August *Washington Post* article attributing to American intelligence the view that the Soviets might launch an air strike against China's nuclear facilities in the northwest. Furthermore, the article noted that "one key official" in Washington "who only a month earlier had rated the chances of a major Chinese-Soviet fight at about 10 percent recently said that the chances now are only slightly less than 50-50." 25X1 Also in late August, the Chinese probably had been informed [redacted] officials also believed that a Soviet air strike could no longer be discounted.

It is likely that Mao and his aides placed considerable credence in estimates made in the American intelligence community (as reflected in the *Washington Post* article) as well as [redacted] 25X1 of Soviet intentions. Mao retreated further from a confrontation in the week after Peking's rejection of a Soviet offer for a Chou-Kosygin meeting in Hanoi at Ho Chi Minh's funeral (4 September). Peking accepted a renewed Soviet bid, resulting in a Chou-Kosygin meeting at the Peking airport (11 September). The 11 September meeting was a reversal by Mao of his policy of refusing leader-to-leader contacts with the Russians, the last such having been the Teng-Brezhnev meeting in Bucharest in June 1965, more than four years before. Although Mao and his aides may have been uncertain as to whether the Soviet threats were to be taken at face value, the Chinese leaders undoubtedly found it prudent to consider a major Soviet attack to be an *imminent possibility*.

Nothing short of such a judgment could have impelled Mao to desist in mid-August from sending out patrols and to agree in early September to a

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leadership-level meeting with the Soviets. This judgment was to be reflected in several additional actions.

— the PRC Government Statement of 7 October, in which the Chinese formally accepted negotiations, contained the most direct and explicit public reference Peking had ever made to the possibility that the Soviets might "dare to raid China's strategic sites";

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III. THE ROAD BACK: DECREASING FEAR OF IMMINENT ATTACK: 1969-1970

The Chinese seemed to have calculated that the Chou-Kosygin agreement to cease forward patrolling on both sides and to begin negotiations in Peking drastically reduced the chance of a major Soviet attack. They settled down to the task of imposing political losses on the Soviets while keeping them engaged in the talks. The Chinese publicly professed to being under threat from the Soviets and, hoping for international condemnation of Moscow, complained that they could not negotiate meaningfully so long as the Soviets refused in advance to withdraw their forces from "disputed" territory. Actually, the Soviet threat was felt to have considerably subsided after negotiations started— 25X1
subsided to the point where Peking need make no concessions in the negotiations.

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Chinese concern about a possible "surprise attack" was further reduced in 1970 even as Peking's

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to avoid provocation at the border. Thus Chou En-lai, speaking to cadres in May 1970 about (among other things) preparations for a possible "quick" war as well as a "protracted" war, stressed China's defensive posture: "don't go looking for provocation; we must be patient."

IV. PEKING EXAGGERATES CONVENTIONAL, DOWNPLAYS NUCLEAR, THREAT: 1970-1972

In order to generate third-country pressure to keep the Soviets restrained and to impose political losses on Moscow for "bullying" China, from mid-1970 the emphasis of Chinese statements on the Soviet threat was shifted away from depicting the danger of a nuclear attack and stressed instead the strength of Soviet *conventional* forces near the border. The Chinese were in fact more vulnerable to nuclear than conventional attack, but the threat of the latter was surely regarded as more credible to the foreign audience the Chinese wanted to reach. To take this line, and to include in it a defiance of Soviet conventional strength—with Peking arguing that China could absorb a major ground attack and successfully fight back despite loss of territory—was more useful for, because more credible to, the Chinese domestic audience also.

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On the matter of *imminence* of attack, the Chinese were relaxed in the spring of 1970, continuing the retreat from alarm.

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The Chinese did not remain completely silent about a possible Soviet *nuclear* strike, but, when they did refer to it, they usually insisted that they could survive such a strike with their "war preparations" activities.

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Chou En-lai himself told

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that China's system of underground shelters would be effective against nuclear attack:

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> We Chinese are not afraid of atom bombs. We are prepared against their attack, against their launching a preemptive attack on us. That is why we are digging underground tunnels.

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it is highly unlikely that underground shelters—the main ingredient in Peking's high-profile surviv-

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ability propaganda were or are an important factor in Soviet thinking.*

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In the fall and winter of 1972, concern about a Soviet attack seemed to be even further reduced, and the Chinese continued to believe that a nuclear attack was less likely than a conventional thrust. They seem to have taken some comfort from the high-visibility trips to Peking of the American President in February and the Japanese Prime Minister in September, calculating that the Soviet leaders would be more reluctant than ever before to attack China after friendly relations had been established with two major Pacific powers.

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a Soviet attack might come *after* Mao died, at which time the Soviets might try to take advantage of tensions in China. This is believed to be a genuine fear on the part of at least *some* Chinese leaders, although their general estimate is probably—as it is in the West—that the Russians will wait to see the shape and assess the intentions of the new Chinese leadership, rather than becoming involved in a protracted and probably indecisive war with China.

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*The Chinese seem to fear Soviet armor above all in the event of a conventional war. In October 1973, a member of the PRC's military delegation suggested to an American contact that the US should not withdraw tanks from NATO forces nor seek to persuade the USSR to withdraw tanks if the US desires to maintain allied security in Europe. The Chinese officer apparently feared that Soviet tanks could be redeployed against China and that this might be a greater threat to China than fighter aircraft or other conventional weapons which force-reduction talks might release for Moscow to redeploy.

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The Chinese acknowledged, in March and October 1972, the problem of defending against the superior firepower and armored strength of the Soviets, but continued to insist that they could successfully beat off a major conventional attack.

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The Chinese view of a possible nuclear attack in this period was that the Soviets would not use nuclear weapons unless greatly provoked. They calculated that the Soviets would be unwilling to take tremendous political losses internationally.*

*The Chinese probably also believed that their own *nuclear* capability was now a mini-deterrent—as the Soviets could not be certain they had targetted all of China's nuclear missile sites.

The first clear statement made by an important Chinese official virtually *dismissing* the chance of a Soviet nuclear attack was made by Chiao Kuan-hua in December 1972. Chiao said: "no responsible government would ever dare to use nuclear weapons" and risk international political losses—i.e., "the people of the world are against it." Chiao pointed out that it had been many years now since the US used an atom bomb, suggesting that the Soviets were similarly reluctant to be condemned internationally.

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Nevertheless, the Chinese have continued to develop their nuclear missile force. The Chinese have, on occasion, discussed the possibility of a Soviet-Chinese war being fought with nuclear weapons, following an initial Soviet nuclear strike. Indeed, the gradual deployment of their medium-range and intermediate-range strategic missiles in recent years reflects a strategy first to add to the deterrent of public opprobrium their own mini-deterrent of nuclear weapons, and, in the event that deterrence fails, to inflict *some* damage on Soviet cities with their small force. (Some Chinese missiles, however, could only be used in theater support operations, to strike concentrations of Soviet troops *within* China.)

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V. CHINESE FEAR NATO FORCE REDUCTIONS: 1972-1975

The prospective European security conference and force-reduction talks created a new concern for the Chinese: any agreement on troop reductions in NATO forces would strengthen Soviet-Western detente and thus provide the Soviets with a freer hand to confront Chinese forces. The Chinese have tried to establish the view that European governments should not trust the Soviets, and have

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given candid depictions of their own security interests.

Chou En-lai in January 1972 pointed to the possibility that

> . . . there will be an East-West detente and the Soviet troops will come on to the northern frontier of China. This disturbs us. Are not the million men already present on our northern border sufficient?

Mao himself in July asserted that a million Russian soldiers had been "shifted" from the Western front to the Chinese border; he went on to suggest wryly that China should be given credit for the shift toward detente in Europe as a consequence. The implication was that European countries, especially France, were dealing with the USSR at China's expense and that China would prefer an end to detente.

Chinese concern was extended by the start of preliminary talks for a European security conference in November 1972. In January 1973, Chou En-lai and other Chinese officials spread the line that the security conference might create a false sense of security; that Peking, rather than favoring big cutbacks in American forces in Europe, now recognized the need for an American nuclear deterrent; and that NATO was indeed necessary and should remain intact until Europeans could defend themselves without the American nuclear umbrella. The Chinese press subsequently ceased its attacks on NATO.

A. The Threat is "To the West," Not China: March 1973

After four years of insisting that the Soviet military spearhead was directed at *China*, Mao and his aides decided to change the line and to insist the spearhead is directed at the *West*. The message in this change was: to NATO countries, that they should reject proposals for force reductions; and, secondarily, to the US, that Washington should recognize that China does not need rapprochement so desperately as to be indifferent to a virtual halt in American disengagement from Taipei.*

*This secondary line is implicit. When discussing the Sino-American relationship explicitly, Chinese officials may deny *any* need for it, and indeed have said that Americans "erroneously believe" that China "needs" US help to bolster its position against the USSR.

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In his August 1973 speech to the Tenth Party Congress, Chou En-lai raised the matter of whether Soviet strategy was directed against China ("the East") or the West.

> The West always wants to urge the Soviet revisionists eastward towards China, and it would be fine so long as all is quiet in the West. China is an attractive piece of meat coveted by all. But this piece of meat is very tough, and for years no one has been able to bite into it. . . . At present, the Soviet revisionists are *"making a feint to the east while attacking in the west,"* and stepping up their contention in Europe and their expansion in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and every place their hands can reach. . . .
>
> We must . . . be fully prepared against any war of aggression that imperialism may launch and particularly against *surprise attack* on our country by Soviet revisionist social-imperialism. [emphasis supplied]

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mid-September 1973, senior Chinese officials said they were worried about the possibility of a Soviet attack on China and, at the same time, asked why Europeans were so apathetic in view

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There is no evidence that the Chinese were engaged in military action on the border in the summer of 1973—action such as forward patrolling or skirmishing with Soviet river-navigation workers. Their policy continued to be to avoid provocation.

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B. A Soviet-American War is "Inevitable": April 1974

The Chinese hit at detente from another angle when they tried to demonstrate to Europeans that they could not sit back, that war was "inevitable," and that therefore they would be involved. In such a situation, Peking argued, force reductions would greatly soften the Europeans prior to a Soviet attack. Chou and other Chinese leaders, however, had a credibility problem in trying to convince European leaders that a Soviet-American war was "inevitable."

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C. The US Nuclear Deterrent for Europe is Unreliable: January 1975

The Chinese have also argued that the US would seek to avoid involvement in a European war with its nuclear weapons. (This line tends to contradict the line about an inevitable Soviet-American war.) Clearly the fear that a formal European security conference might be held in 1975, and at the level of a summit meeting, impelled the Chinese to engage in extravagant pleading.

During talks in early January 1975, Teng Hsiao-ping and Chiao Kuan-hua stressed the inevitability of war in Europe—which the Soviets would start with conventional weapons. The Soviets would *not* use nuclear weapons, the Chinese said, because they expected to conquer and occupy Western Europe. The Chinese said that the US would not risk its own survival by employing its nuclear weapons to repel Soviet aggression in Europe. The Chinese concluded that a strong NATO was essential as a short-term deterrent to a Soviet attack, but that in the long run Western Europe's only salvation lay in developing an "independent" and credible nuclear force "of its own."

The Chinese have used their own position—i.e., a Soviet attack on China probably would be conventional rather than nuclear—to combat the view among European leaders that the US nuclear deterrent would prevent any Soviet attack, provide security for NATO, and thus permit NATO countries to reduce their forces. They have gone on to

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contend that a Soviet-American war might well be fought entirely with conventional weapons, and that European states would need large conventional forces.

The concern of Mao about detente and possible Western force reductions (and the implications of that for China's security) clearly has impelled him to show personal favor to European political figures who oppose detente with the Soviets and advocate strong Western defenses. Thus he has granted personal interviews—extraordinary treatment—to two such men, former Prime Minister Heath of the UK and former Defense Minister Strauss of West Germany. Mao has done this despite the fact that they are political opponents of the current heads of government in London and Bonn.

VI. PROSPECTS

The Chinese view of the Soviet military threat today is short of fear, but also short of complacence. As has been seen, they recognize that the Soviets may be tempted to exploit a period of instability after Mao's death—meaning, presumably, that some Soviet leaders might advocate intervening militarily in the hope that disaffected groups in China would overthrow the successor leadership rather than unite against the invader, or in support of some one group of leaders whom they believed or hoped to be pro-Soviet. Moreover, the Chinese view is long-term; they see the strategic threat from the north as persisting for many years. They seem also to be worried about the prospect of "encirclement"—that is, about the expansion of Soviet influence in India, the Soviet-Indian treaty, and the presence of Soviet naval units in the Indian Ocean, in the Sea of Japan, and even in the Taiwan Strait.

The confrontation at the border, being a result of Mao's desire to contest territory which he had left uncontested for a decade after the founding of the PRC, will probably extend at least to the time of Mao's death. After Mao dies, the matter of whether he really acted in China's national interest or from reasons of personal affront or contempt almost certainly will be discussed within the leadership, and it is probable that some leaders will actively argue for a softening of the hard Chinese terms for a border settlement. The duration of the border confrontation at that future time will probably depend on the nature of a collective leadership, as no one single leader will be able to impose his personal policy on the Party in the way that Mao has. While Mao lives, however, there is not likely to be a softening of Chinese terms.

Mao's way of living with the border confrontation which he provoked, a situation in which the Chinese are dramatically inferior not only in nuclear weapons but in conventional armament, will probably continue to leave a wide margin of safety by avoiding aggressive action on the border. That is, there will be no forward patrolling and no shooting at Soviet border guards or river-navigation workers.

An important aspect of this policy of avoiding a Soviet attack is to keep the Soviet leaders convinced—as they seem to have been after negotiations started in 1969 and still seem to be—that China's military posture is defensive, as in fact it is. The Chinese probably will continue to do this in several ways in the near future. 25X1

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Thus they can be expected to continue to avoid deploying aircraft in reaction to Soviet border reconnaissance flights [redacted] This cautious policy may persist even after the Chinese have produced and deployed up-to-date SAMs, inasmuch as China's overall military inferiority will remain. The Chinese probably will be more careful than the Soviets have been to keep their own border reconnaissance flights within their own territory. 25X1

They undoubtedly will maintain their public position: China will not be the first to attack an opponent (with nuclear or conventional weapons), but will hit back if attacked (leaving it ambiguous whether the counterattack will be entirely with conventional weapons or also with nuclear weapons). On occasion, they may state privately their intention to strike back with whatever nuclear missiles they have deployed if the Soviets should attack China with nuclear weapons. However, the main thrust of their private statements probably will continue to be that they believe a possible future Soviet attack will be with conventional weapons, mainly armor. They probably also will

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continue to say that they do not anticipate *any* Soviet attack in the near future.

Although they will sustain their effort to convince European leaders not to reduce NATO's conventional troop strength, their appeal probably will have little effect. Maintenance of force levels in NATO will be determined by the interests of members themselves, as will be the case in any force reductions. The slow pace of the European security conference as well as mutual balanced force reduction talks should keep the Chinese, on balance, satisfied that Moscow will not have a freer hand to deal with its "eastern problem" at an early date.

Finally, the Chinese will probably try to sustain and strengthen the Sino-American rapprochement as a stronger long-term deterrent to Soviet attack than China itself can provide. At the same time, Peking will continue to encourage Washington to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan. This policy of rapprochement will continue to limit the degree of permissible Chinese criticism of the US, giving this criticism its staccato appearance—in contrast to the unmitigated polemical assault on the USSR, an assault that undoubtedly will continue at least until Mao dies. Because Peking intends to get hold of Taiwan one way or another, it can be expected to try to persuade the US that China does not need rapprochement at the cost of a halt in US disengagement from Taipei. Should it come to a choice, however, the value to Peking of rapprochement with the US against the Soviet threat would probably prove to be greater than the value of early annexation of Taiwan, which could not much help Peking strategically.

The Chinese are aware from Soviet behavior in the border confrontation that the Russians are not eager for a war with China, despite the USSR's overwhelming military superiority. They are also aware that there will be no *need* for a Russian attack on China, as that overwhelming superiority will be retained for many years to come. While they have to consider the possibility that the Soviets will see some *advantage* in making an attack in the period immediately following Mao's death or in some subsequent time of possible crisis, they can calculate with some confidence that the costs would probably be regarded by any Soviet leadership as prohibitively great. That is, a Soviet attack would be much more likely to remove any possibility of exploiting latent pro-Soviet (or, at least, conciliatory) forces in China than to attract huge numbers of Chinese to the Soviet banner or to impose a pro-Soviet leadership group and would mobilize world opinion overwhelmingly against Moscow. Moreover, the war could probably not really be won, as Soviet superiority in materiel would be negated by Chinese manpower and determination, and China could not (unlike Czechoslovakia) be successfully occupied—even after a nuclear strike on Chinese cities. The Chinese can further judge that the commonsense thing for Moscow to do is to wait, to assess the shape and intentions of the post-Mao leadership, to make initiatives for an improvement in relations if the ground seems favorable, or to wait for Chinese initiatives from that leadership or some successor leadership, looking for an improvement sooner or later by political and economic means.

In sum, the Chinese appear to believe that, owing both to Soviet calculations and their own policies designed to avoid or discourage a Soviet military attack, a major attack is unlikely, in either the short term or the long term.

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